DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 327 484 SP 032 729

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TITLE Butterflies, Bugs, and Supervising Teachers.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cooperating Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Informal Assessment; Interpersonal Relationship; *Negative Attitudes; Personality Traits; Preservice Teacher Education; Resistance (Psychology); *Student Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Behavior
IDENTIFIERS *Positive Attitudes

ABSTRACT

This study replicated one conducted in Texas in 1979. Student teachers were asked to list the beautiful things their supervising teachers did for them as well as the things that "bugged" them. Comparison of the results of the 1979 and 1989 studies indicated that the positive factors in the relationships were very similar. Positive factors included: willingness to share, helpfulness, supportiveness, positive reinforcement, fairness, constructive criticism, sense of humor, and care. Comparison of the negative factors in the relationships indicated a more strained classroom environment in 1989. In 1979 negative criticism focused primarily on delivery of instruction, while in 1989 there appeared to be an ongoing struggle between teachers and students over behavior. (JD)

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BUTTERFLIES, BUGS, AND SUPERVISING TEACHERS

by

Sid T. Womack

John Morris (1979) and some of the rest of us published a piece in the December 1979 Clearing House about the commendable and improvable behaviors of supervising teachers entitled "Butterflies, Bugs, and Supervising Teachers." By means of an informal assessment technique, student teachers attending the last seminar of the semester at Texas A&M were asked to list the beautiful things that their supervising teachers did for them on a page with a butterfly on it. The things that "bugged" them were written on a dittoed sheet with a picture of a bug on it. This present paper is a replication of that informal study, done ten years later and in Arkansas, not Texas. Could there be any commonality between the two?

In 1979 in Texas the things that were listed as behavioral butterflies by supervising teachers included, in order of mention:

* willingness to share ideas and materials
* being helpful, kind understanding, and patient
* being supportive of their efforts
* giving positive reinforcement
* showing fairness in evaluating the student teacher
* provided constructive criticism when needed
* treated student teachers like members of the staff
* pleasant and had a good sense of humor even in difficult times
* they were the student teachers' FRIENDS and cared about them

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* expressed trust and confidence in the student teachers' abilities
* open and honest with them
* gave the student teachers many opportunities to experiment and develop new teaching styles
* showed respect toward them and their ideas
* were good, enthusiastic role models for student teachers
* good organizers
* always "there" but gave them enough room to make mistakes

What would student teachers prize most in supervising teachers a decade later? What would be the butterflies they would see, in order of most frequent mention? Our Arkansas Tech University student teachers said these positive things about the supervising teachers in the Arkansas River Valley area:

* shared information, materials, and ideas
* made me feel warm and accepted, introduced student teacher to new people
* enjoyed kids and teaching, which is contagious
* helped me with great ideas for all aspects of teaching
* made me feel good about myself as a teacher
* good ideas for classroom management
* made me feel confident through her confidence in me
* genuinely concerned about me and the students
* encouraged me and gave me space to use my own teaching methods
* organized; allowed me to find things and adjust quickly

As can be seen, the 1979 Texas A&M list and the 1989 Arkansas Tech list

look a lot alike. Perhaps there are some perennial truths to be found in these lists of what student teachers found beautiful in their supervising teachers. There certainly are a lot of compliments for those who undertake this labor of love that is needed to bring a new teacher into the teaching world.

What about the "bugs" that hamper professional growth in student teachers at this critical time of development? The 152 Texas A&M student teachers noted these bugs, listed again in order of frequency of mention:

* they did not provide regular observation and feedback
* they often interrupted while the student teacher was teaching
* they did not provide enough constructive criticism
* they were not always available when they were needed
* they sometimes talked in an unprofessional manner about their fellow teachers, administrators, and students
* they sometimes treated student teachers as aides
* they provided little assistance in improving our teaching
* they were not well organized
* they did not leave us alone [with the class] for sufficient amounts of time
* they often asked us to teach "on the spur of the moment" without prior planning or notice
* they did not give us positive reinforcement when we did well
* they were often dull and boring
* they were too domineering with us and the students

How did the class of '89 see the "bugs" of their supervising teachers? In order of frequency, here they are:

* disorganized
* too strict on discipline
* she didn't smile at the children
* yells
* sends students out into the hall
* sends students to the principal's office all the time
* too structured for kindergarten
* she used paddling as her main discipline
* was very quick to jump on students
* not a good attitude toward teaching
* was very short with Learning Disability kids
* not a regular schedule

This part of the comparison paints a very different picture. Whereas the student teachers of a decade ago and from a different state noticed bugs primarily about the delivery of instruction, the approximately 100 student teachers from this area of a year ago mentioned mostly "bugs" about the ongoing struggle between teachers and student over behavior. This is a picture of a very strained classroom environment. CONTROL seems to be the main issue instead of academics. Yet it is believed that this country is in a time of emphasis on academic endeavors. Maybe what is wished for in classrooms is not what is really happening.

It may be that as schools tighten down on students more and more in a effort to "force-feed" them, our children will begin to swallow less and less. On the other side of the coin, maybe our children should try harder to get the education that our teachers are trying to

give them, also. If we don't get together on this, this kind of daily struggle at school will be the rule, not the exception.

Before critical comments are made about teachers or students, it would be well to remember that forces outside of education may be pushing students and teachers into this struggle. With so much emphasis on teaching toward the tests, teachers must necessarily adopted a driving or "bossy" approach to getting students to learn more. William Glasser (1990) commented on the "boss-management" psychology that seems to be the driving force in so many schools, and how this kind of push seems to actually be working against us in this mutual effort to help students learn more in less time. This kind of informal research seems only to corroborate what he said. It may be that in our push for excellence that we will find what our grandparents told us about teaching many years ago: "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink."

The findings above have some ideas for those who supervise student teachers or interns. It is only through them that the profession stays alive. Student teaching is "the other arm of teacher education." We appreciate and laud all who join with us in this effort. Education couldn't go on without them.

R E F E R E N C E S

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